

Jingle Balls by fearofsilence

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Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

Steve has something special planned for his favorite boy and it's good he's not around to see Steve cue up the music and dig out the shopping bag he'd hidden in the back of the closet. He'd only wonder what on Earth Steve was up to and it'd ruin the surprise.

1. Father Christmas, give us some money

Author's Note:

Day 7: Happy Holidays!

This is set in about 1989, in New York City. Steve is 23, Jonathan is 22, Will and El are 18.

I stayed up 'til 3 AM last night listening to 80s Christmas music. Cruel and unusual torture, if you ask me, and I inflicted it upon myself. It did, however, introduce me to my new favorite Christmas song ("Homo Christmas" by Pansy Division, which unfortunately came out in 1992, so I couldn't include it.)

Still, I didn't finish this, but I wanted to get something out on Christmas Eve so here it is. More to come, of course.

And I'm sorry about the title. Someone should honestly stop me.

A steady stream of sunlight breaks in through the Venetian blinds. Jonathan lets his eyes drift open to the warm rays cascading over pale sheets and pale skin. Beside him, Steve sleeps soundly, lying on his stomach, arms curled around the pillow beneath his head.

He takes a moment to enjoy the sight of his boyfriend's mussed hair falling across his forehead. But only because he hasn't checked the clock, and panic has not yet set in. When he does, at last, realize he's late for work – *again* – an arm slips from its pillow prison and locks around his waist.

"Don't go," Steve groans groggily.

Jonathan lets himself relax into Steve's embrace. What's twenty minutes on the day before Christmas Eve anyway?

"Steve," he says, brushing chestnut locks from Steve's forehead as he

blinks awake. “I have to get to work.”

“Take the day off.”

Jonathan sighs. “I was lucky enough to get Christmas Eve off. I don’t want to push it.”

He tries to wriggle out of Steve’s grasp, but he’s swiftly pinned to the bed by the upper half of his boyfriend’s body. Not that he really minds, it’s just... He can’t lose his job. It’s been damn near impossible getting any freelance work, and his part-time job at the deli is the only reason he was able to afford any Christmas presents this year.

But Steve assaults Jonathan’s neck with a barrage of soft kisses and, really, he doesn’t want to get up. He’d be content to stay here forever if rent and food and water weren’t an issue.

“Come on,” he laughs as Steve’s lips trek up along his jawline. His skin tingles where stubble rubs rough against it. “They need me at work.”

“I need you in bed.”

Jonathan wraps his arms around Steve’s neck and buries his fingers in silky hair. “You’ll have me all day tomorrow and the next day,” he promises, but Steve just makes a whiny sound of protest.

“Ten more minutes,” he pouts and finally presses his lips to Jonathan’s, slowly coaxing his mouth open. Jonathan wrinkles his nose, mumbling about morning breath, but he humors him for a second before slipping out from under him and out of the bed. Steve grunts and rolls back over into the warmth left in his wake.

“I’m already late,” Jonathan says over his shoulder, halfway to the en suite. He locates the toothpaste in the medicine cabinet and plucks his toothbrush out of the cup by the sink. “*Someone* turned my alarm off.”

Steve hides his face in Jonathan’s pillow and mutters, muffled, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure you don’t.”

Once he's finished brushing his teeth, Jonathan dresses quickly and returns to the bedside for his wallet and watch. By then, Steve's already conked out again. Or so he thinks anyway until he reaches out to sweep his fingers along the freckles on the back of Steve's neck and he swats him away.

"Cold," he grumbles, feeling around for Jonathan's hand and lacing their fingers together. "Hurry home. I have a surprise for you."

"A surprise, huh?"

He watches Steve nod without lifting his head from the pillow and breathes a laugh. Part of him wants to skip work just to watch this beautiful man snooze all morning. He wishes he could. He'd like nothing more than to spend every waking moment with Steve if he could – and every non-waking moment too.

In his haste, he nearly forgets to remind Steve he has to pick up his mom, Hop, Will and El from the airport after work. Only at the last minute does he turn and tell him. Steve gives him a lazy thumbs-up.

"Love you," he murmurs against clean white cotton.

Jonathan smiles. "Love you too."

2. Been an awful good (boy)

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for the delay. I tried writing some from Steve's perspective, but it was absolute shit so I'm sticking with Jonathan's POV.

I know it's well past Christmas now. Oops.

First, I want to thank BigBadLittleRed for starting Stonathan Week in the first place. Without you, I don't know if I would've had the courage or motivation to finally post my writing. What a great week it was! I really enjoyed challenging myself, and reading everyone's contributions. Thank you for keeping this ship alive!

Joyce greets Jonathan with a gentle but lingering hug, and Hop with a squeeze of the shoulder. When it's their turn, both Will and El flock to his sides. They lean against him the whole way back to the taxi line, his arms wrapped snug around each of their shoulders. He swears Will has somehow shot up another inch or two since the last time he saw him.

"Aren't you done growing yet?" Jonathan complains, reaching up to ruffle Will's hair, which is longer too. In fact, so much of his brother has changed; Jonathan regrets not being there to see him grow and evolve and become the person he's meant to be. But traveling is costly, so he makes sure to cherish every moment he gets with his family during the holidays.

Will chortles and musses Jonathan's hair in retaliation. "Maybe you're just getting shorter," he jokes, and it's so good to hear his laughter Jonathan doesn't even mind the teasing.

Outside, they flag down a van and Jonathan helps his stepfather load their things into the back. Joyce stands to the side, smiling, while Will and El twitter and giggle their way into the cab – as if they don't already spend most of their time together, what with them both going to school in Indianapolis.

She reaches out to tuck a lock of oily hair behind Jonathan's ear.
"Did you just come from work, honey?"

"They make you work the day before Christmas Eve?" Jim interrupts, incredulous. "At a *deli*?"

Jonathan shrugs. "I needed the extra pay," he says as Jim pulls the van's back door down and slams it shut. "And it's right in the middle of some shops, so, you know, people getting their last minute shopping in, they stop for a bite..."

"You don't have to work tomorrow though, do you?" Joyce asks. She lets him into the middle seat before climbing in behind him. Jim takes the front and tells the driver where to go; Jonathan is surprised he remembers – it's been so long since they came to visit. Usually, he and Steve make the trip back home.

"No," he answers, buckling himself in. "No, luckily I've got tomorrow off to spend the day with all of you."

El gasps. "You can take us to the zoo!"

Jonathan cranes his neck to see her hopeful, bright smile and give her one in return. "We can do that, yeah."

When he turns back to Joyce, she's wearing that Concerned MotherTM look she sometimes gets. Jonathan thinks she misses them all living under the same roof so she could keep a close eye, make sure her children were safe and alright. He tries to reassure her with a soft smile.

"But you and Steve are okay, right?" She asks quietly. "Financially, I mean?"

"Oh, yeah. Steve's making great tips bartending and I get some freelance work from time to time that pays pretty well. We're fine. We're staying afloat."

"Good," she says. She takes Jonathan's hand and pats the back of it with her free one. "That's good."

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El describes dorm life on their way up the stairs. Though Jonathan remembers his own well, he listens intently; it's a new experience for her, and one she's clearly overjoyed by. He felt similarly up until he met his roommate, Dean, who turned out to be a slob and an asshole and had terrible taste in music. It was the best day of his life when Steve told him he'd be moving up so they could get a place together – for a multitude of reasons, getting the hell out of the dorms being only one.

Though *his* music taste wasn't really much of an improvement...

"So you like your dorm mates then?" Jonathan asks, setting the bag he's carrying for his mother on the floor so he can dig his keys out of his pocket.

She nods. "Most of them," she says. "Except Maggie."

"What's wrong with Maggie?"

"She's a mouthbreather," she answers simply and Will snorts.

Behind them, Joyce and Hop are in their own world. Jonathan can just hear their hushed conversation, but can't quite make out what they're saying. Especially when he gets the apartment door open and is immediately inundated with the sound of The Ronettes' "Sleigh Ride" at, quite frankly, an unreasonable volume. The apartment is illuminated only by the soft white Christmas lights on the tree and lining the fire escape window.

"Steve?" Jonathan shouts over the jaunty Christmas tune, flipping the light switch. "Why are the lights off?"

The stereo remote seems to be nowhere in sight, so Jonathan heads over to the system to turn it off manually. But just as he's about to hit the button, the song switches and the grating Madonna rendition of "Santa Baby" begins pouring from the speakers.

Everything else goes dead silent.

"Oh, God," Jonathan gulps, stomach turned to stone, suddenly

recalling Steve mentioning a surprise. Somewhere above his head, a bare leg appears over the stairs' wrought iron railing. "Oh, God. Steve, no."

It's too late. Steve is already sauntering down the stairs, singing along in an exaggerated drawl. Wrong lyrics and all - or so Jonathan would guess if he could hear anything over the blood rushing in his ears.

He's got on what could only be generously described as a 'cock sock.' Festive red-and-green stripes. White pom-poms on each hip.

Complete.

With.

Bells.

In any other circumstance, the sight would be just hilarious and sexy enough to make Jonathan roll his eyes and laugh and whoop and whistle. He'd then pull Steve down by the strings of his ludicrous lingerie and they'd roll around on the couch or the floor and trade lame Christmas-themed puns.

As it is, however, he thinks he just might spontaneously combust.

"My eyes!" Will shrieks.

Steve stops short, halfway down the stairs, eyes wide and round as saucers. His hands shoot around to his front in a feeble attempt at protecting what little modesty he has left. Jonathan glances helplessly between him and his poor, innocent brother. He wishes he could shield him from being subjected to this little show.

As if she can read his mind – and honestly, she probably can – Joyce slips her hands around to cover both Will and El's eyes.

Jim just stands frozen in place, blinking, probably in shock, as Madonna sings "*And hurry down the chimney tonight.*"

A mortified whimper comes from the stairs, and then Steve is darting back up them.

...Jingling all the way.

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry, Steve.

There will be one more part, but I might also write a bonus chapter with these two dorks on New Years.

3. We're here tonight and that's enough

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy New Year! Here's more corny Christmas crap.

And a [playlist](#) too, if you're interested.

Jonathan finds Steve in their bedroom, face-down on the bed. He's obviously distraught – and dramatic, in true Steve fashion – but still, Jonathan finds it difficult not to laugh at the sight of him, in all his naked glory, sprawled out over the clean blue comforter. He manages to suppress it, however; he's not sure Steve would appreciate the humor just yet, given his current state.

Instead, he lies down along Steve's side and silently runs his fingers through his hair.

"Why didn't you tell me your family was coming today?"

His words are smothered by the fabric beneath his face as he continues to avoid turning and meeting Jonathan's eyes. Jonathan doesn't give up his gentle petting, hoping his touch is enough to soothe Steve's embarrassment – though he knows it's not much of a consolation. If he could, he'd hop in his DeLorean and go back about twenty minutes to warn Steve, but...

"I'm sure I reminded you this morning."

Steve finally twists to look at Jonathan. A flush is painted across his cheeks in splotches, deep red and angry-looking. He shakes his head vehemently – or as vehemently as he can without breaking his neck, still flat against the bed like he is.

"No, I-I," he stammers. "...No."

Jonathan brushes brunette strands out of Steve's eyes, gazing at him soft and serious. "I promise you, I did," he says.

Steve groans and squeezes his eyes shut. "Well, you can't just tell me things while I'm half-asleep and expect me to remember!"

“You were awake!” Jonathan insists. “You were talking to me!”

When Steve’s eyes pop open again, it’s to glare accusingly. “Jonathan, you know I’m not fully awake until at least noon.”

“Well, what was I supposed to do?”

“You could’ve called me after work!”

...Yeah, he could’ve. And he admits as much.

“I’m sorry,” he says and resumes petting Steve’s hair. He marvels at the way Steve pushes up into the palm of his hand – almost unconsciously, like he can’t help it. Like the tender touch is a refuge from the enduring shame and humiliation. “I should’ve called to remind you.”

He resists tacking on an ‘*again*’ to the end of that sentence, and Steve nods once, satisfied. Eventually, through more coddling and caressing, the tension in Steve’s limbs and shoulders eases. He shifts to his side and wraps his arms around Jonathan’s waist, burrowing into the soft, stretched neckline of his sweater.

“I’m sorry I ruined Christmas,” he murmurs, breath hot on Jonathan’s skin even through the wool.

He cradles Steve’s head in the crook of his elbow, one hand still carding through his hair and the other rubbing slow circles on his back. “You absolutely didn’t,” he swears. Steve holds him tighter, nose nuzzling along Jonathan’s clavicle. “Besides, is it really worse than last year when you ate two huge bowls of my mom’s broccoli cheese soup and spent the whole flight home in the airplane bathroom?”

“How was I supposed to know I was suddenly lactose intolerant?”

Jonathan hums and presses a kiss to the top of Steve’s head. They should probably be heading back downstairs soon, but Steve’s iron grip tells him he’s not quite ready to face everyone.

After a moment of silence, Steve mutters, “You smell like a Christmas ham.”

"Well, I haven't had a chance to change out of my work clothes."

He can practically feel Steve's sly smirk against his neck. "...Me neither."

"Oh, God," groans Jonathan, pushing himself out of Steve's grasp. But he's laughing, and he's glad Steve's already able to joke about it. "You *are* a Christmas ham."

Steve jumps up, grabbing Jonathan about the waist before he can make it to the closet. He spins him around, pulls him close, and kisses him breathless.

"Love you," he whispers against Jonathan's lips.

"I love *you*. Now get dressed."

While Steve is pulling his jeans on, Jonathan picks the discarded racy number up off the floor by one of its pom-poms. "What corny pick-up line went along with this anyway?"

Steve glances over his shoulder and mutters something incoherent.

"What was that?"

"I was gonna ask if you wanted to jingle my bells," he begrudgingly admits.

Jonathan lets out a loud hoot that could likely be heard from downstairs. "Maybe later, *Santa Baby*."

"You're not gonna let me live this down, are you?"

"Probably not," Jonathan tells him, shrugging. "I mean... Madonna?"

"Well, I would've picked one of the *two* Christmas songs you like, but neither of them are very sexy."

Jonathan has to suppress another laugh at the image of Steve trying to dance to The Kinks' "Father Christmas."

"Fair enough, but- babe, *Madonna*?"

Steve snatches the festive undergarment from Jonathan's hand and tosses it somewhere behind him. It hits the wall and clatters to the carpet with a chorus of tinny notes. Then he pulls Jonathan in again by the front of his fresh sweater and begins walking him backward.

"You're lucky I didn't go with the Hall and Oates," he says as he ducks down to press dry lips to the side of Jonathan's neck.

"Oh, God."

"Yeah."

"That would've scarred poor El for life. You know she loves Hall and Oates." Jonathan grimaces, rearing back as far as he can to look Steve in the face; his head thumps against the wall behind him. "Your fault, by the way," he says, eyes narrowed.

There's a commotion on the other side of the door, like someone clambering up the stairs, followed by a knock.

"Are you two done canoodling yet?" Will shouts through the thick wood. "We're getting hungry down here!"

"Ready?" Jonathan asks, trying to salvage Steve's *very* disheveled hair to the best of his ability. Steve nods, though he looks a little unsure still. Jonathan takes his hand in his. "Well, come on then, Jingle Balls. Time to face the music."

On their way out the door, Steve starts to snicker.

"What?"

"*Jingle Balls*... I wanna be mad, but that's really funny."

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They order Chinese from the place Steve likes and gather in the living room to watch *A Christmas Story* – one of Joyce's favorites and, coincidentally, Steve's too. The food arrives in a surprisingly timely manner and Steve is the first to hop up and help Jonathan get out plates and forks for everyone to serve themselves. Not for the first

time, Jonathan is mildly embarrassed that they don't have a table to eat at. He hates making his mother eat on the couch – though he knows she doesn't really care – but their breakfast bar can only accommodate three of them, so they pile in on the floor and the sofa and continue the movie.

Everything seems to be going well, and Steve is at ease. That is, until Joyce asks, "Where are your parents this year, Steve?"

He shrugs, stabbing at a piece of broccoli with his fork. "Fiji, I think," he replies, and Jim snorts.

"They've got the right idea. Just too bad they aren't here, or they could've seen their son dancing around in an elf Speedo too."

Joyce elbows him, but she has to hide a smile behind her hand. Steve has gone all red again. Jonathan places his hand on Steve's knee and he glances away from his plate finally, a small smile on his lips.

El looks up at them, head tilted in confusion. "Speedo?"

"It's a swimsuit," Jim explains, a bite of seasoned beef left hanging halfway to his mouth. "But not like the ones the boys wear in the summer. Smaller, like–"

"Underwear," supplies Will.

"Exactly."

Jonathan clears his throat. "Okay, can we just–"

But before he can finish his sentence, El is humming thoughtfully. "Oh," she says, busy twisting a noodle around her fork. "I'm sure there are plenty of men wearing Speedos in Fiji." She smiles at Steve like it's meant to placate him; he smiles back, still blushing profusely.

"How did that happen anyway?" Jim gestures to the stairs – the scene of the crime, as it were.

Steve sighs, fork landing on his plate with a *clink*. "I forgot you guys were getting in today," he says.

“Steve isn’t a morning person,” interjects Jonathan. Steve glares at him.

So... maybe he’s not quite over it.

“I *told* him I had a surprise.”

“Well, I just thought you meant something mundane,” Jonathan tries to defend himself. He probably shouldn’t, because he doesn’t want this to turn into a full-blown fight. Not while his family’s in town. But he can’t help it. “Like doing the dishes or laundry. Or baking cookies or something.”

“Baking cookies? When have you ever known me to bake?”

He shrugs. “I thought you might try.”

“And burn the whole building down while I’m at it,” Steve scoffs. “But, anyway, I did all those things, *and* I bought gingerbread cookies from that bakery you like.”

“You did?”

“Yes,” he answers tersely. His voice still has an edge to it, but his face is slowly softening – presumably at the expression on Jonathan’s own. “They’re in the cupboard by the fridge.”

Jonathan sets his plate down and crawls closer to kiss Steve’s cheek. “You’re the sweetest,” he whispers, regardless of the fact his family is surely close enough to hear. “I’m sorry I didn’t leave a note or something.”

“It’s fine,” he tells him, turning his head and kissing Jonathan, short and chaste. “Just remember next time, okay? So I don’t humiliate myself again.”

Will groans. “Stop it, I’m eating here!”

That breaks Jonathan and Steve out of their romantic reverie – but not enough to stop Jonathan from pressing a few more kisses to his boyfriend’s face just to taunt his brother.

“Ugh. I already have to add ‘*seeing Steve Harrington’s balls*’ to the list of horrible things that have happened to me,” Will jokes, mouth full of sweet-and-sour chicken. Joyce whispers an admonishment into a napkin, but Jonathan can see the amusement glittering in her eyes. “Don’t make me watch you two make out as well.”

“Yeah, right,” Steve quips, tossing his own used napkin at Will. “You know you’re in love with me, little Byers.”

“*Ha!* You wish, Narcissus.”

Steve’s eyebrows knit together. “Narcissus?”

“Mike gave him a book on Greek mythology for Christmas,” elaborates El. “He hasn’t put it down in days.”

Will mimes flicking a forkful of food at her, and in turn, she sticks her tongue out at him. Joyce and Jim watch from the sofa, smiling. Things weren’t always so simple, and now that life’s gone back to relative normal, the two of them bickering like regular siblings must be such a relief. After what they’ve been through, minor disagreements and squabbles are nothing.

Steve, having resumed eating, asks, “How is Wheeler anyway?”

“Amazing,” is Will’s dreamy reply.

El rolls her eyes. “He’s doing well. He wants us to come visit him in California this summer.”

Jonathan looks over at Joyce, who shrugs. “We’ll see,” she says.

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Later, when Joyce and Jim have turned in for the night on the futon in Jonathan’s studio, the remaining four settle down and put on *Gremlins*. They leave the lights on, not because any of them get scared – not anymore, anyway, and not of a movie – but because Will has his sketchbook out. He’s sat cross-legged on the air mattress when El sits down beside him and drops her head on his shoulder.

Jonathan overhears her sleepy whisper. “What are you drawing?”

Will doesn't glance away from his sketch, just jerks his chin toward his brother curled up on the couch. Jonathan sees this out of the corner of his eye while he pretends to be watching the movie. Really, he's more focused on the headful of rich brown hair resting on his chest, the arm looped around his middle, the fingers tucked beneath the hem of his sweater, warm against his skin. The only thing he really cares about is the warm, fuzzy feeling of absolute contentment that comes with being surrounded by all of the people he loves most in the world.

He couldn't ask for a better Christmas.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't resist the Byler (Byeler?) implication.
Sorry, not sorry.

Author's Note:

I'm on tumblr too! @notouchyfeely